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Helms Seen Ready to Retire As U.S. Ambassador to Iran

By William Branigin
Special to The Washington Post

TEHRAN, Nov. 1—Richard Helms, the U.S. ambassador to Iran and former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, is about to announce his retirement and he plans to leave his current post by the end of the year, informed sources said today.

Helms wanted Washington to release the announcement of his retirement before the results of the presidential election are known, to avoid any connection with the outcome, and a statement is expected Tuesday, the sources said.

Helms could not be reached for comment immediately, and an embassy spokesman said tonight he was unable to confirm or deny the report.

The sources said Helms, 64, made the decision to retire "at his own initiative." They explained the move by noting that he is approaching retirement age and has already served in

government positions for more than 30 years.

Helms directed the CIA during the turbulent years of the Vietnam war. Former President Nixon named him ambassador to Iran in 1972 when the CIA was under scrutiny for its role in the Watergate coverup.

During his term in Iran, Helms has had to return to Washington often to testify before Congress.

The CIA has influenced events in Iran in the past. In 1953 the agency was instrumental in organizing a coup that returned Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to the throne from a brief exile after the Communist-backed prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, took power.

Helms has enjoyed better access to the shah and has had more influence with him than any other diplomat currently in Tehran or any former U.S. ambassador, the sources said.

He has also been surrounded by unprecedented security precautions. During his three-year tenure, six

Americans have been assassinated by Iranian terrorists opposed to U.S. support for the shah.

Sources said Helms has been particularly effective during some differences that have arisen with the shah over transfers of military equipment and technology. In still-classified cases in which Iranian arms requests were refused, "The shah knew that once he heard it from Helms, that was it," one source said.

Arms sales have been a major feature of U.S.-Iranian relations during Helms' stay in Tehran. A Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff report issued last August said that a secret decision by President Nixon in 1972 resulted in arms sales to Iran in subsequent years "unprecedented for a non-industrial country."

Among sales items listed by the report on the Nixon deal were four destroyers, 80 F-14 Tomcats equipped with the computer-guided Phoenix missile and 528 helicopters. Total sales were estimated at \$10.4 billion over five years.



RICHARD HELMS
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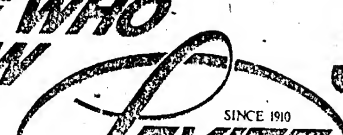
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